

#516



THE SOLDIER'S BIBLE.

BY REV. WM. M. CRUMLY,

CHAPLAIN OF GEORGIA HOSPITALS, RICHMOND.

Among the multiplicity of knapsacks, haversacks, bundles and old clothes, stored in one of the baggage rooms of a hospital in Richmond, I found a *Soldier's Bible*. In this mass of seemingly worthless effects, once owned by our brave soldiers who had died in the hospital, were many precious relics intrinsically worthless and, to the common observer, rather offensive, being soiled, worn and strongly tinctured with the peculiar odor of the camp. Yet each article is a precious gem, a link in the bright chain of memory around which many painfully pleasing recollections cluster.

There is an old uniform, hastily made by a mother or sister when the loved one rushed at his country's call to drive back the invading foe. Here are the accoutrements of war that were buckled on by fair and loving hands, while an earnest prayer was breathed and a hot tear brushed from the flushed cheek of a devoted mother, who whispered, in suppressed tones, "Go, my son, trusting in the God of thy fathers." See that neat little card; it is a daguerreotype taken from that coat pocket—the pocket nearest the wearer's heart. It was a noble, warm face—the heart of a southern soldier—

but now it lies cold and silent in Oakwood Cemetery, that rich mine of Southern wealth.

That daguerreotype : Let us look in upon that modest face, half-smiling, half-blushing, in all the charming beauty of early womanhood ; her large liquid eyes are the very soul of genius ; her full suit of dark hair is thrown back from a lofty brow, white and pure as the soul within ; her dress is exquisitely simple—a close-fitting black silk, with a Confederate bow on a bosom as true to the honor of the South as the ocean is to the rising moon. How much this token was prized by the former owner may be inferred from the well-worn clasp, and that the last glance of his dying eyes fell on it as it dropped from his trembling hand, all moistened with the cold dew that distilled from his brow as the evening twilight of death closed around him, and a low murmur escaped his pale lips, farewell, dearest, beloved only less than my Saviour.

How changed is the original since the bright spring morning when, with Albert by her side, Jennie left her beautiful shadow on the chemical plate—the rose is faded to the lily—the bright smile that played on her sweet face, like pure water rippling over golden sands, has spread into a deep calm eddy, the repose of confiding faith, reflecting the untold glory of the heavenly worlds above, while the eye has a clearer, brighter fire kindling the light of hope, that penetrates the thick gloom of the great hereafter.

In the same pocket with the daguerreotype, I found the *Soldier's Bible*. It was a neat London edition, with a silver clasp, on which was engraven the initials A. L. C. On the fly-leaf was written, in a neat and delicate hand, "A present to my dear son, on his fifteenth birthday, from his mother, M. A. C. Below was written, in the same hand, "Search the Scriptures : for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and

they are they which testify of *Me*." "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

The book had the appearance of being carefully read, there being many chapters and verses marked with pencil, as though they had strongly impressed themselves on the mind of the young reader. Among them were the chapters which describe the heroic daring of the youthful David, the saintly purity of Joseph, and the unflinching fidelity of the three captive boys at the court of Babylon. The first, twenty-third and fifty-first Psalms bore marks of an interested reader. In the New Testament such Scriptures, as speak of the love of God to sinners, were carefully noted: "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Isaiah, i. 18: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." At this remarkably encouraging promise was a large blood stain, as though gory fingers had been tracing out every word; also at John xiv. 1, 2—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions,"—were the same stains of still broader and deeper dye.

Some of the incidents in the life and death of the soldier, who owned the Bible we have just examined, may prove interesting and useful to our readers.

Albert was the only son of a pious and wealthy planter of the South. Most of his time during his childhood was spent in the country on his father's plantation. The little white cottage was half buried in evergreens and richly festooned with fragrant vines, among which the wild birds nestled and sang their sweetest melodies. On the hill, at the end of a

long avenue, stood the quiet country church, where little Albert, accompanied by his parents, sister and aged grandmother, met the families and children of the neighborhood to spend an hour in Sabbath school, and then listen to the reverend man of God, who preached to them the precious Word of the Lord. Here and around the family altar, Albert received that moral training which laid a deep and broad foundation for a character, in many respects, worthy of imitation by all who may read this simple narrative. In the Sabbath school, Albert first formed the acquaintance of little Jennie, neatly dressed in a white muslin with a blue sash, who afterwards became the beautiful and accomplished Miss S., whose daguerreotype we found in the soldier's coat pocket. She was the intimate friend of his sister Hattie, and often his successful competitor for prizes offered by the superintendent of the Sabbath school.

In the year 1856, Albert was sent to college to complete his education, and Jennie went to a female institution of high grade to mature her classical studies.

A few notes that ran the college blockade and vacation meetings sufficed to keep up their acquaintance and friendship. In the summer of 1860, they both graduated with honors highly creditable to them and gratifying to their friends. On their return home, early attachments ripened into something more than friendship; but scarcely had the bright vision of hope dawned, when it was overcast by the dark cloud of war that suddenly arose upon our horizon. The country called the brave young men from every quarter to rally in Southern prowess, and with battle shock roll back the invading foe. Albert was one of the first to respond. He took his place in the ranks as a common soldier, feeling it was honor enough to be a private, defending his country, his home and his beloved.

Jennie; and all the more, as he had her approving smile to encourage him.

Albert's departure and transfer to Virginia by rail are scenes so common to soldiers, that they can be imagined or remembered far better than I could describe them.

There is one incident, however, which I will mention: Just before he took leave, they were all called around the old family altar. Jennie was there. Maum Patty, the nurse of his childhood, was there, with snow-white kerchief about her ebon brow and silver locks. Many were the bitter sobs, while the deep, earnest voice of the father in solemn prayer, like the patriarch Abraham, bound his son, his only son, a sacrifice on his country's altar; the victim was covered with a rich garland of warm embraces, gemmed with many a burning tear; when the amen was pronounced, there was in all a feeling far too deep for utterance. In this moment of ominous silence; a mother's hand placed the Soldier's Bible in a pocket near his heart. Albert moved slowly down the avenue, the embodiment of youthful chivalry and manly beauty. The spectators stood like breathless statues, fearing, most of all, they would see his face no more. Just as he turned the corner at the end of the avenue, he cast one glance back to the scenes of his childhood, which never before seemed half so dear. It is the last sight—he will see them no more forever!

His first night in camp was a trying one, surrounded, as he was, by many that were thoughtless and gay, as if they were merely on a holiday campaign; but Albert was more serious and felt that he must maintain his religious character, and that to begin right was of great importance in his new position. By the camp-fire he read a chapter in his Bible and knelt on the ground and prayed, covered by the silent heavens that looked down with a thousand starry eyes on the lone worship-

per, surrounded by the glare of camp-fires and the hum of the multitude, that rose on the night wind like the voice of many waters, and died away among the distant hills. After a long and uncomfortable transit by rail and forced marches, with weary limbs and blistered feet, he was thrown into the battle of Manassas, on the 21st of July, 1861, with scarcely time to kneel by an apple tree in battle line, over which the shells were howling furiously. Here, in prayer, he hastily committed his soul and body to his faithful Keeper, then rose calm and serene, with an assurance that no weapon of the enemy would harm him.

When the battle was over and victory perched upon our banner, Albert found himself surrounded with the dead and dying, among whom were some of his particular friends. He was strongly and strangely exercised with a mingled feeling of joy and grief, a sort of hysteric paroxysm of laughing and crying, weeping for the slain, and rejoicing that he had escaped unharmed, with a deep consciousness that God had been his shield and hiding-place in the hour of danger. Albert endured all the sufferings of fatigue, cold and hunger incident to a winter campaign; none murmured less, none were more faithful in the discharge of duty than he. The demoralizing effects of the camp, with almost the entire absence of religious privileges, produced a coldness in his state; and although he did not compromise his moral character by profanity, gambling and drunkenness, as many others did, yet he failed to enjoy the close communion and clear sense of the Divine presence which he had done in former days. In this state of mind, he entered upon the seven days battles before Richmond. The solemnities of the occasion aroused him to a sense of his danger, causing him to cleave more closely to his Bible and its precious promises. With his hand on this

blessed book pressed to his heart, he called on God to be his shield and support in the hour of battle. He passed the terrible ordeal of Gaines' Mill on Friday, and Malvern Hill on Tuesday, where the men fell around him like grain before the reapers, and covered the ground thick as Autumn leaves. A degree of joy and gratitude swelled his heart as he surveyed the field of death, in view of his own wonderful escape, but not so deep and warm as on a former occasion, when his faith and piety were more earnest and simple. Albert continued at times to read his Bible; but it was evidently more as a task than a pleasant duty, his keen relish for divine things had abated very much; the excuses of camp life, long marches, and the general indifference of officers and men upon the subject of religion, offered his conscience the consolation of a temporary opiate. Sometimes, however, on the reception of letters from home, and sometimes when alone on his midnight round of picket duty, he would shed a penitential tear, and resolve to double his diligence and regain his lost ground as a Christian; but a plant so tender and unprotected by the pale of the Church, unwatered by the dews of the sanctuary, persecuted and scathed by the lightnings of contempt, nipped and browsed upon by every wild beast of the forest, necessarily became greatly dwarfed in life and growth; a feeling of self-security, a trust in fate or chance, impressed him more than a simple faith in the ever-present God. In this spiritually demoralized condition, he entered the Sharpsburg fight, without even asking God to protect and save him from danger and death. Soon after the battle opened, he was struck by a ball, and carried back to the rear as a wounded man; from profuse hemorrhage, a sick, dreamy sensation stole over him; the light faded from his eyes; while a thousand mingled sounds filled his ears, and a faint vision of home, friends, green turf,

battle-fields and grave-yards flitted by like phantoms of the night. With returning consciousness, there came a sense of shame and sorrow for having declined in his religious state, and a conviction that his wound was the chastening of the Lord, to rebuke his wanderings and check his self-reliance.

As soon as he was sufficiently restored, he drew from his pocket his neglected Bible, kissing it many times over, and bathing it in tears, as truly penitential as Peter when he wept at the feet of Jesus. His bloody fingers searched out the old cherished promises of God, leaving many a gory stain on the blessed pages of inspiration. The law of the Lord again became his meat and his drink, on which he feasted by day and by night; a new life was infused into his soul, which enabled him to bear his sufferings with true Christian heroism.

In this condition, I found him in the old Academy Hospital in Winchester, lying on the dirty floor, with a blanket for his bed and a wisp of straw to pillow up his wounded limb. While sitting by his side, trying to minister to his soul and body, I received from him this narrative substantially as I have given it to you. After much severe suffering, when our army fell back, he was sent to Staunton and thence to Richmond, where I again met him just in time to witness his last triumphant conflict with suffering and death. He was in a hospital, reclining on a clean, comfortable bed; his head resting on a soft, white pillow, on which the familiar name of a distinguished lady of Georgia was marked—she having contributed it from her own bed for the benefit of the suffering soldiers. Near him sat the matron of the hospital, rendering every possible comfort that the sympathy of a woman could suggest, intensely sharpened by the recent loss of a promising son, who fell in a late battle. Reduced by a secondary hemorrhage and amputation, Albert, with a calm, steady faith, came down to the

cold waters of Jordan, where he lingered for a short time, and dictated a letter to his mother, which I wrote for him, in which he gave an appropriate word to each one of the family, not even forgetting Maum Patty, his old nurse, and reserving a postscript, the last and best, for Jennie. I would like very much to give my readers a copy of this letter, but it is the exclusive treasure of the bereaved and afflicted ones, whose grief is too sacred for the intermeddling of any save the most intimate friends. After pausing a few moments at the close of the letter, he seemed self-absorbed, and soliloquized thus: I die for my country and the cause of humanity, and, with many others, have thrown my bleeding body into the horrid chasm of revolution to bridge the way for the triumphal car of Liberty, which will roll over me, bearing in its long train the happy millions of future generations, rejoicing in all the grandeur of peace and prosperity. I wonder if they will ever pause as they pass to think of the poor soldiers whose bones lie at the foundation of their security and happiness? Or will the soul be permitted from some Pisgah summit to take a look at the future glory of the country I died to reclaim from fanatical thralldom? Will the soul ever visit at evening twilight the scenes of my childhood, and listen to the sweet hymn of praise that goes up from the paternal altar at which I was consecrated to God? Though unseen, may it not be the guardian angel of my loved one?" Checking himself, he said: "These are earthly desires, which I feel gradually giving way to a purer heavenly sympathy." Then, in a low, sweet voice, he repeated:

"Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away,
So I but find them all again
In that eternal day."

He repeated the last line with an emphasis that threw a beauty and force into it which I never saw or felt before. Seeing that he was communing with his own soul, and that spiritual things in the opening light of eternity were rising in bold relief before his vision of faith, I withdrew a short space from him, feeling it was holy ground, "where the good man meets his fate, quite on the verge of heaven." He then gently laid his hand on his Bible and the daguerreotype that lay near his side, and amid this profound stillness, surrounded by a halo of more than earthly glory, gently as the evening shadows, the curtain dropped, leaving nothing visible to us but the cold and lifeless clay, on which a sweet smile rested, as though it had seen the happy soul enter the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem. Thus, far from home and friends, this noble youth fell asleep in Jesus, swelling the long list of the honored dead; but, "though dead, he yet speaketh." The precious treasure, "*The Soldier's Bible*," has been returned to the family, and is now one of those valued relics that bind many sad hearts with links of gold to by-gone days.

Now, my dear fellow-soldier, I leave with you this simple narrative, without comment or application, hoping that you may find something in it to interest, instruct or encourage you while performing the honorable, yet responsible and arduous, duties of a soldier.

THERE IS SWEET REST.

Come, soldiers, don't grow weary,
But let us suffer on;
The moments will not tarry—
This strife will soon be done.
The passing scenes all tell us
That peace will shortly come:
Our banners wave in triumph
O'er every Southern home.
There is sweet rest for you.

We never will grow weary,
But battle to the end,
And trust in God and Davis
Our country to defend.
The battle-fields all round us
Are red with human gore,
Where friend and foe together
All sleep to wake no more.
There is sweet rest for them.

And when we close this warfare,
That sets our country free,
We'll change the swords to plough-shares
That won our liberty.
Then crowned with faceless honor
To useful life return,
Till the evening shadows darken
Our quiet Southern homes.
There is sweet rest in Heaven.

MY BIBLE.

This book is all that's left me now ;
Tears will unbidden start—
With faltering lip and throbbing brow
I press it to my heart. •
For many generations past,
Here is our family tree :
My mother's hands this Bible clasp'd—
She, dying, gave it me.

My father read this holy book
To brothers, sisters dear :
How calm was my poor mother's look,
Who lean'd God's word to hear.
Her angel face—I see it yet!
What thronging memories come!
Again that little group is met
Within the halls of home.

Thou truest friend that man ever knew,
Thy constancy I've tried ;
Where all were false I've found thee true—
My counsellor and guide !
The mines of earth no treasures give
That could this volume buy ;
In teaching me the way to live,
It taught me how to die.

Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F03-2193